The Command to Fast

by Imâm Ibn Kathîr

> 183. 0 you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may acquire Taqwa
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> 184. Fast for a fixed number of days, but if any of you is ill or on a journey, the same number (should be made up) from other days. And as for those who can fast with difficulty, (e.g., an old man), they have (a choice either to fast or) to feed a Miskin (poor person) (for every day). But whoever does good of his own accord, it is better for him. And that you fast is better for you if only you know.

The Order to Fast

In an address to the believers of this Ummah, Allah ordered them to fast, that is, to abstain from food, drink and sexual activity with the intention of doing so sincerely for Allah the Exalted alone. This is because fasting purifies the souls and cleanses them from the evil that might mix with them and their ill behavior. Allah mentioned that He has ordained fasting for Muslims just as He ordained it for those before them, they being an example for them in that, so they should vigorously perform this obligation more obediently than the previous nations.

Similarly, Allah said:

> To each among you, We have prescribed a law and a clear way. If Allah had willed, He would have made you one nation, but that (He) may test you in what He has given you; so compete in good deeds. (5:48)

Allah said in this Ayah:

> o you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may have Taqwa).

Since the fast cleanses the body and narrows the paths of Shaytan. In the Sahihayn the following Hadith was recorded:

> 0 young people! Whoever amongst you can afford marriage, let him marry. Whoever cannot afford it, let him fast, for it will be a shield for him.[1]

Allah then states that the fast occurs during a fixed number of days, so that it does not become hard on the hearts, thereby weakening their resolve and endurance.

The various Stages of Fasting

Al-Bukhari and Muslim recorded that 'A'ishah said,

> "(The day of) 'Ashura' was a day of fasting. When the obligation to fast Ramadan was revealed, those who wished fasted, and those who wished did not."[2]

Al-Bukhari recorded the same from Ibn 'Umar and Ibn Mas'ud.[3]

Allah said:

> …those who can fast with difficulty, (e.g., an old man), they have (a choice either to fast or) to fred a Miskin (poor person) (for every day).

Mu'adh commented,

> "In the beginning, those who wished, fasted and those who wished, did not fast and fed a poor person for each day."

Al- Bukhari recorded Salamah bin AlAkwa' saying that when the Ayah:

> …those who can fast with difficulty, (e.g., an old man), they have (a choice either to fast or) to feed a Miskin (poor person) (for every day).

was revealed, those who did not wish to fast, used to pay the Fidyah (feeding a poor person for each day they did not fast) until the following Ayah (2:185) was revealed abrogating the previous Ayah.[4] It was also reported from 'Ubaydullah from Nafi' that Ibn 'Umar said; "It was abrogated." [5]As-Suddi reported that Murrab narrated that 'Abdullah said about this Ayah:

> fast with difficulty, (e.g., an old man), they have (a choice either to fast or) to
> (poor person) (for every day).

"It means 'those who find it difficult (to fast).' Formerly, those who wished, fasted and those who wished, did not but fed a poor person instead."[6] Allah then said:

But whoever does good of his own accordmeaning whoever fed an extra poor person, it is better for him. And that you fast is better for you

Later the Ayah:

So whoever of you sights (the crescent on the first night of) the month (of Ramadan, i.e., is present at his home), he must observe sawm (fasting) that month (2:185)

was revealed and this abrogated the previous Ayah (2:184).

The Fidyah (Expiation) for breaking the Fast is for the Old and the Ailing

Al-Bukhari reported that ‘Ata heard Ibn ‘Abbas recite:

> And as for those who can fast with difficulty, (e.g., an old man), they have (a choice either to fast or) to feed a Miskin (poor person) (for every day).

Ibn ‘Abbas then commented,

> “(This Ayah) was not abrogated, it is for the old man and the old woman who are able to fast with difficulty, but choose instead to feed a poor person for every day (they do not fast).”[7]

Others reported that Sa’id bin Jubayr mentioned this from Ibn ‘Abbas. So the abrogation here applies to the healthy person, who is not traveling and who has to fast, as Allah said:

So whoever of you sights (the crescent on the first night of) the month (of Ramadan, i.e., is present at his home), he must observe sawm (fasting) that month. (2:185)

As for the old man (and woman) who cannot fast, he is allowed to abstain from fasting and does not have to fast another day instead, because he is not likely to improve and be able to fast other days. So he is required to pay a Fidyah for every day missed. This is the opinion of Ibn ‘Abbas and several others among the Salaf who read the Ayah:

And as for those who can fast with difficulty, (e.g., an old man)

to mean those who find it difficult to fast[8] as Ibn Mas’ud stated. This is also the opinion of Al-Bukhari who said

> , “As for the old man (person) who cannot fast, (he should do like) Anas who, for one or two years after he became old fed some bread and meat to a poor person for each day he did not fast.”[9]

This point, which Al-Bukhari attributed to Anas without a chain of narrators, was collected with a continuous chain of narrators by Abu Ya'la Mawsuli in his Musnad, that Ayyub bin Abu Tamimah said;

> "Anas could no longer fast. So he made a plate of Tharid (broth, bread and meat) and invited thirty poor persons and fed them."[10]

The same ruling applies for the pregnant and breast-feeding women if they fear for themselves or their children or fetuses. In this case, they pay the Fidyah and do not have to fast other days in place of the days that they missed.

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